



PROMOTING RAIL TRAVEL IN NORTH SHROPSHIRE & SOUTH CHESHIRE

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Reply to David Fletcher

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This is the response to the consultation on the December 2023 by the Crewe and Shrewsbury Passenger Association. (CASPA).

CASPA is the passenger association covering the stations of Crewe to Shrewsbury including the intermediate stations at Nantwich, Wrenbury, Whitchurch, Prees, Wem and Yorton. The Association aims to promote, encourage and improve the use of the rail services on this route. The Association is open to all members of the public, and we welcome new members at any time.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. CASPA attaches great importance to timetables as it has a significant impact on travel in the towns between Crewe and Shrewsbury.

Introduction

CASPA focuses on the portion of the line between Crewe and Shrewsbury. Of particular importance are firstly the number and frequency of intermediate station stops and secondly on the connectivity to the North via Crewe, and South via Shrewsbury. North Shropshire and South Cheshire are areas of continued growth and all towns are seeing residential building projects and a steady increase in passenger footfall. We ask that TfW respond to this growth. Trains call at Nantwich, Whitchurch and Wem, with request stops at Wrenbury, Prees and Yorton. The main daily services are provided by a 2 hourly shuttle between Crewe and Shrewsbury. Additional irregular stops are made by Manchester to South Wales services at the main towns of Nantwich, Whitchurch and Wem. There is significant commuter traffic northwards via Crewe to Manchester, and southwards via Shrewsbury to Birmingham. Access for passengers to these services is key.

Intermediate stops northbound

Nantwich gains an extra northbound stop at 10.19 and we welcome this.

We see many removals of stops on the services intended for Mk4 trains. We note that the path time is longer and can only assume that the stops are deleted because of the slower overall train speeds. This does not provide any benefits to the passengers to the intermediate station on the line with direct access to these services. For the most intermediate station passengers can get a slightly earlier stopping train and change at Crewe. Of course, at Crewe TfW are not the only operator.

An exception is 20 56 Ex Shrewsbury. Passengers arriving from South Wales have to wait an unreasonable 90 minutes for a stopping service to Crewe. We ask for the stops at Wem, Whitchurch and Nantwich to be reinstated on this service.

We note that stopping trains are unevenly timed during the day. By way of example for Whitchurch has stops at 16.09, 16.47 and 18.12. This are gaps of 28 minutes and 85 minutes. Hardly a regular service which we can reasonably expect.

Intermediate stops southbound

The train at 05.58 no longer has request stops at Wrenbury, Prees and Yorton. This leaves a big gap more than two hours for service at these stations. We challenge the removal of the request stops.

We welcome the additional stops at Nantwich and Whitchurch for the 08.09, 10.09 and 12.09.

We challenge the removal of the stop at Wem at 16.37. This is needed to provide service and should not be arbitrarily removed.

We need an extra stop at Nantwich on the 17.09 Ex Crewe. This service carries a lot of commuter traffic from Manchester going to Nantwich. All these passengers currently grossly overload the 17.19 shuttle for the journey to Nantwich and the extra stop would greatly alleviate this. We have been asking for this for many years.

Trains

We welcome the introduction of the new class 197s and repurposed Mk4 trains. As we write these, we have yet to see any of these on Crewe and Shrewsbury services. We note that the shuttle is diagrammed as a 2 car 197 and we welcome this and the redeployment of the Class 153s.

We deplore the continued use of Class 150 and 153 on long distance services between Manchester and South Wales. These old trains are slow, uncomfortable and noisy. Long ago we had a commitment that the shuttle would always have a two-car unit, and that in the event of problems, alternative stops would be provided on through trains. We consistently see TfW not maintaining this basic standard of services to the towns. We find this unacceptable. We ask for your assurance that if the shuttle is cancelled, the following fast train will stop at all stations to provide service continuity. It is very frustrating in these situations (which are frequent) to see trains to pass without a chance to travel.

Connection issues

The first all stations service north from Shrewsbury at 05.31 needs to connect to the 06.27 Crewe to Manchester. It is an important connection to maintain which CASPA campaigned for many years ago, and resulted in a good increase in traffic. With the timing proposed this is not a formal connection. We suggest to move one or other by 1 minute and flag this as a guaranteed connection.

The last service from Manchester is 22.30. This is far too early for late workers, dinner, theatre and concert trips. We need an all stations stopping service to Shrewsbury leaving Manchester at around 23.30.

Also, on this current last service from Manchester at 22.30, in the 2022 timetable this train is split at Crewe (MX). If it runs late, the stopping train at 23.14 ex Crewe does not wait and passengers are abandoned. There is no later train. This connection must be guaranteed with the 23.14 waiting as necessary for the train from Manchester, or run the Monday timetabled service all through the week.

We return now to the 17.09 Ex Crewe. This service carries a lot of commuter traffic from Manchester going to Nantwich. In the event of late running, the connection at Crewe with the 17.19 shuttle is

missed. The next all stations stopping train south is more than two hours away. The adjustment for this is either hold the 17.19 as a guaranteed connection (it is not now going to Cardiff), or add extra stops and request stops to the 17.09 or 18.09. The current situation is not acceptable for the passengers from the request stop stations.

Southbound connections between the shuttle and South Wales trains at Shrewsbury are generally about 30 minutes. This is just about acceptable, but a poor substitute for intermediate stops and a direct service. The connection time to Birmingham is around 20 minutes. There are 2tph to Birmingham, working with West Midlands. But each hour they depart within 10 minutes of each other. Can we do better here to provide a more even spread?

All these connections are crunch points for CASPA where we repeatedly see a breakdown in service, when it does not need to be. The resilience needs to be built in, rather than left to chance. They are about ensuring the system is usable, even in times of disruption. We ask for specific assurances about these important connections not from December 2023 but now.

Overall

Our aim is for a consistently reliable service between Crewe and Shrewsbury every hour with logical connectivity at these stations for onward travel. (Branch lines between Crewe and Derby and Stoke manage to do). Most importantly, the trains should run as promised.

With the introduction of the Mk4 loco hauled services, this is clearly a potential threat to intermediate stops in Shropshire and Cheshire. The introduction of these services needs to be of benefit to all and not just an exclusive Cardiff Manchester express.

The consequence of this is that there is an increasing reliance on the 2 hourly shuttle to service the route. CASPA recommendation is for a minimum of an hourly service at the main stations of Nantwich, Whitchurch and Wem (preferably with through services) and a two-hour frequency at request stops. With the current proposals, long distance passengers will mostly be required to use the shuttle and change at Crewe or Shrewsbury. Often the most convenient connection is to travel in the wrong direction, and then catch a fast train going the opposite way. Will TfW include this in the allowed route and not charge extra for this? If this cannot be timetabled, then the shuttle should be at hourly.

The shuttle will no longer form part of the HoWL diagrams. We don't understand the benefits or drawbacks of this. The shuttle is an important part of the service to local stations and the fact that the units will not have to travel from Cardiff and back every day for service, could be considered a benefit.

CASPA will challenge all changes to the stopping pattern. We object to arbitrary cuts to these important stops, because of pathing challenges at Crewe and Shrewsbury. We need to discuss these issues because they have consequences for passengers.

We remind you again that Whitchurch southbound platform has no step free access. Passengers to and from this station are greatly disadvantaged, regularly having to travel in reverse directions to Crewe and Shrewsbury to access services. It is time this was put right. It is not a big task.

The Consultation

We regret the short time available to undertake this response. It is very difficult to put these issues together at this short notice over a holiday period. It is inevitable that TfW will get less back.

The nature of the information provided the consultation is unacceptable. Just providing a bare timetable is not sufficient. At the very least, we need a comparison from the previous timetable, a simple commentary on what TfW is trying to achieve, and any impacts that you have recognised. Without this, we have to do considerable work just to make the comparison, and then second guess what is reasonable. This all takes time which you have not given us.

We remain available for further discussion on this and the future timetables.

End

08/01/23